



Retail Food Protection #23

Program Information Manual

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Part 6 - Inspection
Chapter 01 - Code Interpretations
Number 3-201

Question

Must employees wash their hands after handling money and before touching food or food-contact surfaces?

Discussion

It has been speculated that both paper currency and metal coins might act as fomites - inanimate objects that may be contaminated with infectious organisms and serve in their transmission. If this is so, then people who contact food would be required to wash their hands between handling money and touching food or food-contact surfaces.

In 1971, FDA asked the Treasury Department's Bureau of Engraving and Printing if paper currency could transmit disease organisms. BEP's reply stated that "...specifications for currency paper require that it contain fungicidal agents ... hav[ing] germicid[al] characteristics...[which] retain their effectiveness throughout the life of currency in circulation." Additionally, "The inks used...on currency also contain ingredients which inhibit the growth of bacteria." A 1973 survey of 217 bills of various denominations found low numbers of organisms (1.46-167.26 per square centimeter), thus supporting BEP's position.

That same survey tested 161 metal coins again finding low levels of organisms (19.50- 413.29 per square centimeters).

Based on this information, it seems that "...money is not as heavily laden with microorganisms as commonly believed." Low counts are likely due to the fact that "microorganisms cannot survive well on inanimate objects because of the lack of proper temperature, moisture and nutrients necessary for them to reproduce."

It would appear that neither paper currency nor metal coins are likely fomites.

Interpretation

Although employees who touch food and food-contact surfaces must wash their hands as often as necessary to keep them clean, it is not necessary that they wash their hands each time they handle money.

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